

LONDON in the 19th Century.

HAUNTED LONDON.

ST. MARTIN'S-LANE.

THERE is no post-office directory in which one can find out the addresses of London ghosts. This is an oversight.

I never go out in London, but I meet my ghosts; and yet, before I can lay my hand on their bony shoulders, they whip into a cab, or up an alley, or round a turning, and are off before I can ask them for a card. Charles the First, for instance, whom only last Tuesday I met at the door of the Admiralty, carrying his head, with its peaked beard—for coolness, I suppose—under his arm; then there is old Johnson, with the scorched wig, I saw to-day, going to look for his old corner where he planned his Hebrides expedition with Boswell, at the Mitre, in Fleet-street; then Izaak Walton, with his fishing-rod, in Chancery-lane; and so on.

Well, I am out now to take a note of the whereabouts of the St. Martin's-lane ghosts, and shall take the notes on my thumb-nail.

Thumb-nail? Not much room even for short-hand notes on that—not much on the duodecimo little finger, and not much more on the quarto thumb. But Hogarth found it room enough. That little sturdy observer of men, in his sky-blue coat, and his triangular cocked-hat tipped up over his broad, full, round forehead, to show the scar he was proud of on his right temple, used to ramble about London, sketching droll faces on his left thumb-nail.

I often wonder if there will ever be a London Claude Lorraine. If there ever be, he will, for the first thing, paint London sunshine, out of whose radiance I have just come from St. Martin's-lane into my dark chambers, as a man comes from a morning bath in the molten gold of the sea with the sun on it, to re-dress himself before breakfast in the soft darkness of a Marine Parade room with the blinds down. Sunshine through spring woods is a delicious thing, so is sunshine through three feet of June grass, fit for mowing, when the thick flowers close like waves over your face as you lie on your back and listen to the lark that the angels are calling to from that hollow snow-ball of a cloud. But as we have none of these delights, and are all built in for various terms of imprisonment in long defiles of houses, walled all with black and brown brick, caged under miles of red tile roofs, in streets where the chimneys keep telegraphing to each other by smoke signals, at windows where consumptive geraniums sicken for fresher air, and no thin weed dares to take root between the joints of the bricks, from Pharaoh's hard brick-yard, where flowers are curiosities, and the hot dark breath of Care's kilns and furnaces thickens the smiling air, which struggles to be bright and free, let us

make the best of it. Talk of your mountain distance, your air perspectives! I never saw anything in the blue gaps of the Apennines more fairy beautiful than the blue grey fog that turns the end of a London street as you look down in it into mystery and beauty, that gives the present a tinge of the uncertainty of the future and the past, and throws a halo of poetry over Gower-street or Soho. And look now how the London sunshine falls in a white luminous veil, such as hid the face of Moses before that vulgar block of houses in Blue Ruin-street: two pawn-brokers, a publican's, and an undertaker's. That white fog of glory slants across the end of the street, where the cab No. 3174 is breaking through it, like a new Jacob's ladder, the cords, golden threads of sunbeams, let down in gracious mercy once more to allow some poor suffering life-burdened wretch to crawl up it to the Bright City. Why, it is a complete angelic exhibition, and should be charged for. It is worth a guinea a seat, yet no one looks up; no one but that poor little skeleton girl with a frozen bunch of yesterday's water-cresses in her lean hand, who huddles in the doorway of Lattat, the sharp attorney, who (brute) is, actually as I speak, tapping at the glass to bid her go away. See, too, you purblind artist with the microscope eyes, who can find nothing to paint in this our dear London—the darker bar that strikes like a giant's sword-blade through the great woof of cobweb sunshine we speak of—can't imagine where it comes from? Oh, Macguelp, thou mole-eyed misuser of unpaid-for pigments, dost thou not see that it is the shadow of the chimney above us, which, standing in the way of the royal blessed purifying sunshine that brings hope and gladness into the very eyes of the dying, enfeebles and dims that path of darkness. Talk of Samarcand and your Chinese splendour! Is it not gorgeous to see how the sunshine glistens on those great gold letters, "BARCLAY, PERKINS, & Co.," that are heraldically displayed on the great board above the publican's (Druggers') garret window at "The Fivealls," and makes them shine like letters hewn out of solid bullion?

Well, that white sunshine and that blue fog at the end of London streets are the first things I should paint if Providence had made me a London Claude, as Turner, the barber's son in Maiden-lane, might have been. The next thing I should paint would be the magic and enchantment of a London night, if paint there could be ground from metals or jewels to do it. Would not I "go in," as my old friend Macguelp calls it, for those ladders of lamps, those shot lines of stars, those bridges of light, which turn London at night into a perpetual Pekin at lantern carnival time? What is Rome and the "Moccoli" to it? Go and walk to-night up Piccadilly, and see the lamps before you trying to tell your fortune by shaping themselves into perspective letters and words, all beginning with A. Look at them across the Park, like so many spark-stars breaking out in paper just consumed. See the gilded trinkets of the illuminated jewellers' shops, the colours, the rarities, the wonders, the steam

mouse-traps, the air-pumps for opening oysters. Observe the dark pool of shadow, where the lamplight does not reach the tree shadows of the lamp-post; the gutters, running with blood, where the chemist's crimson beacon light sheds baleful influence; see all this, and go and paint what you see, wiping out all smirking, trim peasants and perennial flower-girls; eternise, Macguelp, the cyclopic grandeur (however ugly or misshaped it be) of London!

I was determined to ransack and re-rummage the poetry and associations of that old street of the benevolent French saint, from the great porticoed church with the giant sooty pillars, that somebody seems to have begun painting with Indian-ink and left unfinished; from the broad square with the Spanish name of glorious memory, where the poodle lion stretches out his wiry tail, guarding Northumberland House; and from the silver-plumed fountains, waving, banner-like, in the wind, that seems to try contemptuously to blow them away altogether; up northwards, to Long-acre; up beyond the turn leading to that old church in Covent-garden, where Charles the Second's favourite author, Butler, who wrote *Hudibras*, sleeps, undisturbed by the jar of the early morning carts from the market gardens. It is a little too late in the year to see the chesnuts roasting over the night-shade tins, pierced with fiery holes, that the rushlights of our youth used to burn dimly and penitentially in; but there is one of those Amazonian old Irishwomen, in a bygone coachman's many-caped coat, sitting patient and stubborn as a look-out man in the "crow's-nest" of a whaler: her red and green apples, greasy with rubbing, arranged in decent pyramids; the cocoa-nut well watered; the oranges judiciously thrown out by a background of traditionary blue paper.

I did not choose the night for my note-taking stroll: but I set out for St. Martin's-lane—the Grub-street of our early painters—a pleasant April morning, in the boyhood of one of those days when we count the hours by the number of the rainbows.

A slight, quick, fervid shower—tears more of happiness brimming over than anger breaking its bounds—had just fallen, and pricked the dry grey pavement into a dark lace pattern of spots, out of which you could select the newest by their being sharper in outline and darker than the rest. The aristocracy of five minutes ago, and the parvenus of the last moment alike, as the soft warm rain fell now quicker and more petulantly passionate, melting one into the other, losing shape, plan, and purpose, as the stone washed luminous brown, and transparent as slabs of Cairngorm agate.

I am glad it was not one of those gusty days of early March, when the brown dust, dry and pungent as pepper, runs before you in a long trailing thread, as if it were leading one by a fairy clue to some fairy labyrinth, or blows in strange semicircles, that try to diagram themselves and form ground plans on the dry, clean, cold pavement. There were no stray MS. bits of paper blowing about like sybilline leaves, or

fragments of a stationer's shop, torn to pieces by a hurricane; no tormenting wind to ruffle the leaves of the cabmen's capes, to fan the ohemut fire to a magnificent crimson bloom, to wrench feloniously at the cold bright weather-cock coronet of St. Martin's Church that you pitied and shuddered to see so high up aloft in its fickle, solitary, and chilly splendour—admirable type of royal happiness. No angry wind was running about, as if to warm itself, or screaming round corners in a helpless, imbecile, and mendicant way. No wind was there to sway the golden perches, caught but never landed, that dangle and flicker over the doors of "fishing-tackle" shops; or to blow almost off its hook the crown of black rag strips, or the suicidal negro baby at the marine store shop entrances.

No, quite the reverse. The street-sweeper's legs are not black purple, nor is the crouching Lascar in bed-linen at all frozen, nor are the objectionable songs sold to him in the *Row* as Christian tracts, blown about like scattered doves. No, the day is one when the great grey endless terraces ring sharp and hopefully under the lounging foot, and sordid wretches in tindery rags pass with baskets full of fragrant blood-brown wallflowers on their arms, and children run after people with quilled-up bunches of violets that they long to keep; and if you were now to wander out to the great flat nursery gardens round Fulham, you would find slow melting snows of blossoms on every tree. As for Covent-garden now, it is a halo of delight, like a fairy tableau, and you expect to see the ballet come dancing up between the banks of Barcelona nuts, whose shingle is oranges and winter apples, and whose boulders are Valencia melons.

I am out taking notes on my shining thumb-nail, because (as I have said) it seems to me, and has long seemed to me, that there is no Blue or Red Book, no Post-office Directory, where you can hope to find the proper addresses and directions of the London ghosts. Though every square stone in the London pavement is really a tomb-stone, containing pressed down beneath it some old association, legend, or memory, some dry flower of poetry long ago, trodden under foot; when, long since, the fresh turf was first turned into a continuation of the great stone case of this Babylon cemetery of ours, and its life was swallowed up by the spreading death that is still gnawing away at the suburbs, fretting further and further, like a spreading iron-mould, or a widening blot. London history loses interest from its diffusion. Once seize strongly the real prominent associations of a district or a street, and for ever after when you pass the houses seem tapestried with names and legends. London has always been the stage of England, and every street of it is a volume of its history.

It is a curious fact in street science, not, I think, before recorded, that every state of wind and weather drives its peculiar flock of people into the street, who are seen at that time, at no other time, and at that time only. This is a fact

beyond all contradiction; why it is, I know not, but I believe it may be traced to deep physiological causes, and is connected with very subtle laws of attraction, cohesion, and sympathy. The causes have alliances, Dr. Regenbogen thinks, with electricity and magnetism, and are most highly curious proofs of the preponderance in the present age of the nervous above the muscular, and all the coarser organisations. There are your north-east people, your sou'-west people, your nor'-west people, and your——But why need I box the whole compass when the fact is so palpable to a keen observer. It is useless to tell me that this is an imagination, and is really caused by the moods of my own weatherbeaten mind being influenced by the weather. This is absurd; the wind being sour and north-east does not make *me* north-east, nor all the people I meet north-east; no, the simple fact, scientifically proved (only science is jealous and will not record it), is, that the north-east wind brings out north-east people. It appears at first a wild assertion, but it is true that, during the sour, bitter, blighting, ill-tempered prevalence of the east wind, you meet no good-looking person, no virtue, no beauty, no honesty, no worth. Every third person is a money-lender or a fraudulent bankrupt; the costermongers are pickpockets, crack-skulls, and cut-throats to a man. Poverty prevails—lean, greasy, buttoned-up poverty—not struggling and hopeful worth, but bilking, lying, skulking, and hopeless. You meet no decent comely old age crowned with the white coronet of time, wisdom's mark of brevet rank and coming promotion. No, not one, but rather sour nut-cracker-men, with no kind, full lips like the rims of decanters, but screw-snippers, Harpagoes born of Sycoraxes, skinflints who have come out for a breathing after having cut off their eldest son with a shilling, turned their favourite daughter out of doors because she burnt the breakfast muffin, written six dunning letters, and kicked their pet dog violently down stairs. All the officers you meet then are bullies, all the doctors quacks, all the lawyers rogues, all the clergymen sceptics, all the women are ugly, and all the men cheats. North-east people's faces are blue and yellow, the nose is frosty red, and the lips are white; they are slovenly in dress, and insolent in manner; they always drive the wrong side of the road, and tread on your corns—in fact, they are NORTH-EAST people, and one cannot go further than that. Ill-conditioned, suicidal, felonious people, &c., they are generally middle-aged, and often old and spiteful.

It was only yesterday, however, under this very same pompous church, reared by Gibbs, of Aberdeen, that I met nothing but mild, pleasant, sweet-eyed south-west people, and it put me in a good mood for kindly note-taking.

What dust-powdered antiquarian can tell us what Norman king, in intervals of malvoisie-drinking and boar-hunting, gave the name of an Hungarian saint to this parish outside the walls? What had the anchorite Bishop of Tours (only fancy an anchorite bishop), who with eighty monks beat their backs nightly to a cruel red in their mo-

nastery of Marmoutier, near the episcopal city, sometime early in the fourth century — what has that saint and confessor, who was the first deified demigod of the Romish Church, to do with the modern haunt of tailors, jewellers, biscuit-bakers, who know nothing about him, never think of him, and do not know even that their own schoolboy exclamation of "Betty Martin" is only a corruption of one of the old prayers addressed to the benevolent saint who divided his cloak in two with his sword and gave half to a beggar (a sure proof the cloak was no mackintosh, because half of that is no use)? It must have been a rude, wild age that thought much of the deed of the French bishop. If old Johnson had lived in those times, and been seen carrying the poor dying street-walker up the greasy staircase leading to his chambers, he would have been sainted at once, and literary men would now have a St. Johnson to pray to for second editions. But let us quietly drop down the well-shaft of a dozen centuries or so, to the quiet time when the place was mere extramural turf, pasturing quiet, unambitious generations of flowers, long families of white-starred daisies with the clearest possible descent from the seeds that Adam brought from Paradise. Every now and then to be spurned out, perhaps, by the broad hoofs of tournament horses, or the hobnailed shoon of turbulent countrymen, brought up by Cade and other violent reformers.

What old St. Martin's church was like, we may not know; it has passed into "air, thin air," or rather into the thick air of London, the murky, coppery, witch smoke that wraps our Babel. Its altars, tombs, and shrines are gone, its kaleidoscope windows, its starry chapels, the music chamber of its bell-tower—gone, with the king who built it, and with his three great victims—Surrey the poet, Fisher the aged saint, and More philosopher and statesman.

And now we have in its stead the pompous fabric of pedant Gibbs, of Aberdeen; a man learned, but without genius, who, in five years, and at a cost of 32,000*l.*, built this lifeless church with the besmoked pillars and the high steps, grateful to beggar-boys. This is the dull, hard-faced pedant, with the cataract of wig we know by Hysing's portrait; Gibbs, the little, pert, and squab-faced kindly man whom Hogarth drew, and who designed the poet Prior's monument in the Abbey; Gibbs, the hide-bound Aberdeen man, who went to Italy to learn how to copy and to jabber about Palladio and Vitruvius; Gibbs, who built St. Mary's in the Strand, one of the fifty new churches of his age, and who put together the Ratchiffe Library and the Senate House. Gibbs, though a non-juror and a Scotchman—both suspicious circumstances in a rebellious age, when many faces were straining their eyes over the water—was a kindly man, and was aided by Wren when that great little man had been disgraced at Court, and was living in stoic retirement at Hampton Court; he got churches to build when Vanbrugh, that Swift and Pope laughed at a little unjustly, could not get one to

do, because his comedies had disgusted the clergy. Dull and ponderous as the eternal black-and-white monument of that Aberdeen merchant's son, whom the Earl of Mar first patronised, may seem to us, it is a curious record of Hogarth's age, of its architectural religion, and its imitative sham architecture. Yet it was praised by Sir William Chambers, the friend of Goldsmith and Johnson, the Chinese decorator of Kew Gardens, and the builder of Somerset House. 'I do not know what Chambers did not say of St. Martin's Church; he compared its portico to that of the Pantheon at Rome, which certainly has the same number of Corinthian columns. Savage, in his mad poem *The Wanderer*, burst out in boisterous bathos:

O Gibbs! whose art the solemn fame can raise
Where God delights to dwell, and man to praise—

verses no more absurd than those of Wordsworth's sonnet—

Dear Jones, when you or I—

but requiring some brave contempt for humorous association before they can be comfortably swallowed, besides the confusion of the meaning as to whether the church is where man praises, or is a building that he praises, not to mention their want of connexion with anything in the rambling poem. We admit the compact beauty and unity of the portico, as well as the simplicity and neatness of the interior, but the steeple is a heap of stone crushing in the porch, and there is no contrasting day and night of light and shade in the crude dull building, with its upper and lower deck windows, its sham rustic work, and its rows of tea-urn ornaments. It looks dead and soulless, and with the handle of a steeple snapped off would be the very thing for an assembly-room, which at present, with the staring royal arms cut in stone over the entrance, it not a little resembles.

Death is something like misfortune—it makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows. There, in snug vaulting, under those six ponderous black-and-white pillars, and that tower with the bodkin holes through it to let out the bell music, lie as strange an assembly of incongruous people as Death ever invited to his silent soiree. Here are met proud statesmen and rich painters, play-writers and actors, the rouge all off, the frown smoothed away; the sneer gone, all wrapped in the grave-dress, that changes with no fashion, that is cool enough for summer, and hot enough for winter. Here is lively Farquhar, the quondam officer; Roubilliac, the great sculptor and the friend of Garrick; John Hunter (just removed); witty Bannister, the actor; the learned Boyle, the contemporary of Newton; poor, kind-hearted Nell Gwynne; Dobson, the painter, whom Vandyck dug out of his garret; Secretary Coventry, and Mayerne, the learned French physician of James I., who was the first to write on the chemistry of colours, and gathered some of his receipts from the lips of Vandyck himself.

If you wander up St. Martin's-lane now, not altogether careful whether you walk on the

mosaicked pavement or the striped pitchen, and careless of the charge of those fiery Ruperts and Cavalier drivers of London, the Hansom cabmen, you will see here and there, amid lines of buff-coloured, mud-splashed, square-topped houses, a residence that shows some signs of ancient grandeur—heavy brick cornices and long fluted pilasters of a dull red—which enables you to fairly realise that in this lane, which then had hedges flanking it, and a turnpike leading to Covent-garden, opposite Salisbury House, where tradition says the seven bishops lodged before they went, a nosegay of martyrs, to the Tower, dwelt all sorts of plumed and starred great people of the time of Charles I., Charles II., and the early Georges. Raleigh's son, for instance; the poet Suckling, who sang so bewitchingly of the country wedding in the Hay-market; Kenelm Digby, the eccentric chemist and Platonist, of whose beautiful wife Ben Jonson writes; the great demagogue Chancellor, Shaftesbury, who so nearly upset old Rowley, his master; Archbishop Tenison; Mayerne, James the First's quack physician; Ambrose Phillips, that Pope laughed at for his pastoral, that Gray parodied; Mytens and Vandernost the painters, and a host of others. Fuseli, too, the wild Swiss, who painted ghosts and monsters, Reynolds before he went to Great Newport-street, and that dull Dorsetshire gentleman who painted the dome of St. Paul's, and whose daughter Hogarth married, Sir James Thornhill, lived here and died.

The room where a Quaker's meeting-house now stands, is where the flighty French sculptor Roubilliac had his studio, it is in Peter's-court, where, too, the first English academy had its meetings and classes, that Hogarth denounced as likely to fill the profession with every boy that could not afford to go to school.

And here especially—for our room runs short before we have scarcely more than sketched the present aspect of "the lane of St. Martin—" was Old Slaughter's Coffee-house, the resort of all the engravers and painters of Hogarth's cocked-hat time. Here, on his thumb-nail, he took down some of the humours of club life, such as he has shown us in his "Midnight Conversation," where the two sandbank parsons are the only persons sober at four o'clock in the morning. The chief visitors at Old Slaughter's, where, years after, late, at the dusk, Wilkie, pale and worn from his casel, used to steal in, are worth mentioning, as showing the society whom Hogarth loved to snap his sharp sayings at, and to drink and laugh with. There was Isaac Ware, the old architect, whom, when a chimney-sweep, a gentleman had seen sketching the portico of St. Martin's Church with chalk on a wall, and upon that picked him up to study in Italy. There he is with the inerascable stain of soot still on his old yellow skin. He lives in Bloomsbury-square, in the house where old D'Israeli afterwards lived. Next him is Gravelot, who keeps a

drawing-school in the Strand, and did the designs for Hammer's small Shakspeare. Perhaps his fellow-worker, Grignon, the engraver, is with him. Then there is Gwynn, the architect, who competed for Blackfriars-bridge, and built the bridge at Salisbury; he is a friend of old Dr. Johnson, who writes his prefaces for him, and comes to see him in Leicester-fields, where Hogarth lives, with the gilt cork head over his door. Then there is fat old Hudson, the fashionable portrait painter, who is such a poor stick that he has men to paint his drapery for him. He is Hogarth's butt, the little satirist calls him "a fat-headed man," and loves to trick him with sham Rembrandts, of which he has a rare collection. The "fat-head" lives in Great Queen-street. Next him is M'Ardell, the engraver, who lives at the Gold Ball, in Henrietta-street; he engraves for Reynolds, who lauds him to the skies. He engraved for Hogarth brave old Captain Coram, who reared the Foundling, and died poor, but happy. Then there is that mad, drunken, clever Luke Sullivan, who etched the March to Finchley, who little thinks now that he will die in a garret half starved. But why is not Gardelle, the portrait painter of Leicester-fields, here? Because he is in the condemned cell at Newgate for murdering his landlady, and Hogarth goes to-morrow to sketch him in the fatal white cap. That quiet old fellow in the corner is old Moser, who manages the new academy in the lane, in Roubilliac's rooms; and those men just come in are fresh from the "Dons at the Barn" Club, opposite St. Martin's Church, just by the watch-house. They are Smith, a pupil of Roubilliac's; blind Parry, the Welsh harper, a great draughts player; Red-nosed Wilson, a clever young landscape painter; and Hayman, the painter whom Hogarth went to Calais with.

Look now at the mountain heap of wicker flasks on the floor; see the squat Schiedam bottles with the badges on them thrown by in a corner; observe the cloaks, and swords, and wigs, and cocked-hats, hung on the well-known pegs. One fellow, though fallen on the floor, still sings "Sally in our Alley." One is asleep; another sets his ruffle on fire trying to light his pipe. Two are moping back to back; and yet lo! the door opens, and in comes another smoking china caldron of punch.

